Caring for ourselves
During the coronavirus
For survivors of sexual violence & abuse
Trauma-informed practices to care for ourselves during the coronavirus pandemic
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For survivors of sexual violence & abuse

Traumatic events (such as the coronavirus pandemic) - whether or not they’re related to sexual violence & abuse - can bring feelings associated with your trauma back to the surface; including feelings of isolation, anxiety, powerlessness & the questioning of basic assumptions surrounding life, safety & security.

Some of the feelings & reactions to trauma that may be resurfacing can provide reminders of the sexual violence & abuse you have been subjected to, with constant reminders proving exhausting & even retraumatizing. This period of time can exacerbate trauma & trigger emotions that you thought you had shelved in a neat little box. Remember that healing is not a straight line... there are highs & lows.

You don’t have to do it alone. Many other survivors may be going through something similar. Conditions that were already challenging for survivors are now exacerbated & the needs of sexual violence & abuse survivors are being left out of the national dialogue in more ways than one.

What you are feeling now is a normal reaction to an abnormal situation; in the same way that your previous reactions to sexual trauma were normal reactions to an abnormal situation & they helped you survive.

This booklet will explore some of the feelings & responses to the sexual violence & abuse you have been subjected to that may be resurfacing for you during this pandemic (please note, this is not an exhaustive list). This booklet will also provide you with some corresponding self-care suggestions to help you be kind & gentle with yourself if you are finding that these feelings & responses are resurfacing.
A normal feeling/response following sexual violence & abuse that may be resurfacing during the Coronavirus pandemic

#1

Sleep & eating difficulties (change in sleeping & eating patterns)
Meeting basic physical needs such as eating well, sleeping, exercising, drinking enough water & taking care of our bodies is really important for our self-care. Exercising is important, but so is rest. It is important to take the time to rest when your body calls for it. This time is stress-enhancing & anxiety-producing; being in a state of hypervigilance is exhausting. If you find that you are struggling with some of the other self-care suggestions, going back to basics can be a really good starting point.

Write down some of the physical activities you would like to do...

- Yoga
- Dancing
- Walking

How's your sleeping pattern? Write down the last dream you had that you can remember...

Fill in this space with your favourite foods...

Colour over the water droplets to keep track of how much water you're drinking each day (one water droplet = one glass of water)
A normal feeling/response following sexual violence & abuse that may be resurfacing during the coronavirus pandemic

#2

Anxiety, depression, anger...
It’s okay to feel however you are feeling. This uncertainty surrounding the pandemic can cause many feelings for survivors to resurface, such as feeling unsafe and taking extra caution. You may also be experiencing seemingly contradictory feelings; you can feel both joy & sadness, excitement & anxiety or even anger & peace. Many of these feelings that seem good or bad will surface & that is okay. It might be helpful to bring your thoughts outside of yourself; you could write down or draw a map of your feelings with a colour representing each feeling – think about the size of each feeling and give it a similar amount of room on the paper. Only do this if it feels manageable & if you are in a safe space to do so.

Use this space to write/draw your feelings....
A normal feeling/response following sexual violence & abuse that may be resurfacing during the Coronavirus pandemic

#3

Feeling overwhelmed
Unplug

When every piece of news surrounding the coronavirus goes viral, it can often seem like there’s no escape. We may want to learn all we can about the pandemic to stay current, feel connected & try to make sense of it all. However, for some survivors, all of this coverage can trigger emotions & responses from trauma you have been subjected to.

It’s probably near impossible to avoid all the coronavirus news (and you may not want to avoid updates altogether) but taking the time to deliberately unplug can help reduce potential triggers. You could try reading less of the news (only looking at key updates), restricting time on social media and sticking with Netflix or a book to turn down the volume.

Use this space to write down activities you can do that don’t involve any media/devices...
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#4

Inability to concentrate
Get distracted

Sometimes, if you are having difficulties concentrating, distraction is not always a bad thing; it can simply allow you to concentrate on a smaller task that doesn’t require as much intense thought. For some survivors of sexual violence & abuse, sometimes we need to take a step back & distract or self-soothe. Distraction can work because it interrupts your mood & forces you to ‘shift gears.’ This could mean going for a walk/run (safely whilst abiding by social distancing measures), writing/reading, watching TV/films/listening to music, drawing/painting, having a cuppa/coffee/hot chocolate, meditating, practicing deep breathing or relaxation techniques...anything that can help you to re-ground; these activities may also be easier to concentrate on if you are having difficulties trying to concentrate on bigger tasks (for instance, work).

Use this space to write down some ideas...

- Reading
- TV/Films
- Painting
- Cuppa
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#5

Feeling isolated
Unsuprisingly, this period of isolation and social distancing can exacerbate feelings of isolation for survivors of sexual violence & abuse. It’s crucial to have a safe support network you can reach out to when the going gets tough, especially in times of this isolation. Take time to connect virtually, whether this be through messaging, phone calls, video calls or using services that enable you to carry out joint activities simultaneously, such as Netflix Party.

**Write down the names of people you can connect with virtually in the speech bubbles...**
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#6

Feelings of powerlessness
No pressure

There are many things in the situation surrounding the pandemic that we are unable to control. However, there are also some things that are within our control. Focus on these things. One way to try & regain power is keeping a sense of routine in our lives or by using our voice to support & share with survivors who may be having similar experiences. After all, we are not alone - carrying the burden of being subjected to sexual trauma doesn’t belong solely to ourselves. But survivors don’t owe anyone anything; we have every right to decide how and when we participate in the conversation, if at all.

MY WAY OF TAKING POWER BACK...
A normal feeling/response following sexual violence & abuse that may be resurfacing during the coronavirus pandemic

#7

Feelings of hopelessness
It's okay to wonder what could have been

With the situation constantly changing and a seemingly illusive end somewhere in the distance, it can be hard to stay hopeful, especially when considering the things that the pandemic may have caused you to lose. Many of us may be grieving for what was & what could have been if we were not living or trying to survive a pandemic. You may be grieving the many lives of those known & unknown to you that have been impacted by the coronavirus, or the plans you have put on hold or cancelled. It’s okay to wonder what could have been. You don’t have to feel guilty for doing this.

Things to look forward to at the end of this pandemic...

- Coffee shop catch ups with friends
- Being able to hug friends
- Going to the beach
SELF CARE ISN'T SELFISH
A final note for survivors of sexual violence & abuse

There is no right way to feel right now.

There is no wrong way to feel right now.

There is nothing wrong with vulnerability... with being human... for this is what ultimately unifies us.

As we move through these challenging times, I invite us to become gentler with ourselves & others. I invite us to find ways towards a calm within the outer chaos. I hope in this mandatory season of stillness, we come home to the truth that we are enough. We have nothing to prove. Any moment in which we catch a glimpse of this truth is freedom.
For self-care activity ideas and daily/weekly plans, please take a look at our ‘Caring for ourselves during the coronavirus’ booklets. These can be found at www.gina.uk.com/resources.

Free to download
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This resource has been created by the GINA Project CIC
GINA provides private, specialist counselling for individuals subjected to sexual violence & abuse.

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